7 'Legitimate' Knowledge

Methodological Debates and the Political Sociology of Knowledge Production

Sociologists seem to have forgotten, to paraphrase Raymond Williams, that education is not a product like cars and bread, but a selection and organisation from the available knowledge at a particular time which involves conscious or unconscious choices.

(Young, 1971, p. 18)

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter examined the notion of 'forbidden' knowledge conceptualised in terms of knowledge that is considered 'taboo' or dangerous to produce. The content of this knowledge as well as the processes and lived experiences of academics' accounts took a transnational approach in situating such forbidden knowledge in relation to sociopolitical, historical, and geopolitical contexts. In this chapter, I turn to the conception of 'legitimate' knowledge. I examine the construction of 'legitimacy' drawing on political, sociological, and philosophical conceptions and interrogate what constitutes legitimate knowledge. Foucault's work has enabled the recognition of the influence of the relationships of power on constructing fields of knowledge (Foucault, 1969; 1975; 1976), and Bourdieu, using the concept of 'capital', has argued that knowledge must be accepted as important within a given field of power and its relationship to other fields of power (Bourdieu, 1986).

Examining examples of various systems of legitimation, for example, disciplinary methodology, university world rankings, impact, employability, and publications, I propose that 'legitimate' knowledge not only is the opposite of forbidden knowledge but also relates to the dynamics and relationships of power in what knowledge is deemed acceptable and validated.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

7.2 CONSTRUCTIONS OF 'LEGITIMACY' AND 'KNOWLEDGE'

In the political science literature, the notion of 'authority' is central to understanding legitimacy. This entails both the perceived 'right' of the authority and its 'acceptance'. In philosophical terms, the notion of 'legitimacy' has a normative status, with implied validation – implicit or explicit. In examining individuals' beliefs in societal context, Weber (1978) argued that there is a tendency to conformity in line with cultural beliefs, as the perception of support for this social order seems valid, and this is therefore taken as a 'norm'. As such, 'legitimacy' in sociological terms can be understood as a collectively formulated process resulting in 'the taken-for-granted support of an aspect of social life (e.g. an action, a procedure, an individual, a position, or a structure of positions) by a real or an implied audience' (Johnson and Watson, 2015, p. 823). Thus, it entails social, cognitive, and normative dimensions.

The sociological theorisation of 'legitimacy' entails a complex and dynamic interrelationship of the conceptions of belief, truth, and justification. Goldman (2002), drawing on the literature of social epistemology, distinguishes between four constructs of the term 'knowledge': (i) knowledge as equated with belief; (ii) knowledge as institutionalised belief; (iii) knowledge as true belief, and (iv) knowledge as justified true belief. Goldman places the first two constructions of knowledge as typically used by sociologists, whereas the latter two constructions tend to be represented in philosophical theories of knowledge.

The notions of truth and justified truth in relation to knowledge are illustrated in the account below, where truth is socially understood in the context of an audience and where the justification arises from an agreement of what is true:

> And I think the only way you get to truth, or at least an agreement as to what we should decide is true, is by having different perspectives and people from different perspectives providing input into the process as well as into the final result. Without that I really do not think we can arrive at either an assessment of what is true, but also an assessment of what we would all agree upon is fair and decent. So for me academic freedom is the pursuit of that end result that we call can at least be comfortable with as opposed to just one side winning because one side has all of the power. (Professor Emeritus of Law, George Washington University, US, p. 2)

It could be argued, however, that the notion of agreeing on what is true differs from Goldman's (2002) notion of 'justified' true belief. Justification in

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

the given account is not constructed in terms of a logical process or on the basis of perceived irrefutable empirical evidence. Rather, it comes closer to Goldman's (2002) notion of institutionalised belief, arrived at through a process that is perceived to have legitimacy through inclusivity. What is clear in this account is the central place of process that is deemed to be 'fair' in arriving at a conception of truth that is justified, and therefore legitimated.

The notion of justice or a sense of the 'right' is raised in the following two examples given of research entailing 'epistemic violence', and as such deemed to lack legitimacy:

> Is the research in itself, does it have epistemic violence or ontological violence within it? And not just about the human but also about nonhuman, if I can extend it into that. These are really deep questions. And I think it's that whole thing about resurgence of eugenic research which is really what that empire and stuff, you know the pushback now at the moment. I think there's subtle eugenics coming back into research and legitimated as such. (Professor of Cultural Studies, Curtin University, Australia, p. 11)

> I mean for me, there is no legitimate science around the argument race and intelligence are genetically linked, because race is a social construction, it varies from one time to another and from one society to another. So for me the argument ... would be the same argument as somebody saying we should not stifle debate about the possible dangers posed by women who could be witches. I mean there is no legitimate debate about whether a proportion of women are witches and I do not think there's any legitimate debate about whether there's a genetic link between social race and fixed levels of ability. I think it's a hangover from the scientific racism of the 19th Century and it just continually every 10 or 20 years puts on new clothes, wraps itself in the latest scientific kind of language and pretends to be different to the previous versions. (Professor of Education, University of Birmingham UK, pp. 7–8)

In the second excerpt, the analogy with research on women as witches is based on a contemporary social agreement of the preposterousness of any such belief as truth. The logic of the account is that any such claim lacks justified scientific or empirical basis and, therefore, lacks 'truth'. Drawing on this logic, the science of race and intelligence is delegitimated as an outdated racist science of the nineteenth century, based on unjustified and false belief. Goldman (2002) argues that knowledge necessarily entails belief, and so understanding how we reach knowledge requires a consideration of the routes to belief, which are largely social.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

7.3 WHAT CONSTITUTES LEGITIMATE KNOWLEDGE

That truth is a social institution was illustrated in the preceding account equating research on women as witches with research on race and intelligence. Shapin (1994) highlights that a claim 'is never determined by the individual making the claim' but rather can be understood in terms of a collective judgement, which is then used as a standard in the future by which this 'truth' becomes 'stabilised'.

The literature on the sociology of knowledge has highlighted various types of factors complicit in the formulation of knowledge, including class, political interests, gender, and so on. Science was considered to be beyond such influence by early sociologists of knowledge (Mannheim, 1936; Merton, 1973), although later sociologists of science from the Edinburgh School did not consider science to be outside the influence of society (Goldman, 2002). Longino (1993, p. 260) has gone further arguing that not only is there the social context within which science takes place, but also this context is 'an integral part of the epistemic nature of science'. Similarly, Kitcher (1993) locates social within the epistemic, pointing to how science is organised through practices of consensus, which is necessarily social and associated with a scientific community. The use of statistical evidence in the field of race equality in education is an example of how 'quantitative approaches often encode particular assumptions about the nature of social processes . . . that reflect a generally superficial understanding of racism', yet, such knowledge of 'race inequality' is legitimated (Gillborn, 2010, p. 253).

The issue of what knowledge is taught in schools and higher education institutions is operationalised on the basis of a belief that 'some areas of knowledge are more worthwhile than others' (Young, 1971, p. 34), and so 'worthwhile' knowledge reflects sociopolitical dynamics of power in society. Social consensus of belief stabilises into truth.

This section examines a range of factors and processes implicated in the legitimation or delegitimation of knowledge including positionality; university diversity initiatives; discourses of civility; disciplinary constructs of methodology, 'quality', and the 'Canon'; skills, employment, and research assessment; funding and international partnerships; and university world rankings and publications.

7.3.1 Positionality

Legitimate knowledge is framed in relation to *positionality* – in terms of both *who* is the knowledge producer and *where* the knowledge is being produced.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

The positionality component of legitimate knowledge relates to the perceived 'right' of the authority. The second component of legitimate knowledge entails the processes by which it is recognised as legitimate. This component relates to the 'acceptance' of the authority.

As a White UK researcher on race in education, David Gillborn reflects on his positionality in conducting research in schools: 'As a White researcher I would be able to hear things from staff that I would not hear if necessarily I was a minoritised researcher' (p. 4). In addition, his positionality as a White male researching racism gives a greater legitimacy to the knowledge produced: 'Members of the oppressor class are taken more seriously as witnesses to oppression' (p. 4). In addition, career progression and positionality raise ethical issues: 'White researchers come along, do their research, go off and build a career and nothing changes for the Black folk experiencing the inequalities' (p. 3). Gillborn formerly directed the Centre for Research on Race in Education at the University of Birmingham, the only university-based centre at an English university focused on racism in education. He comments wryly that: 'I do not think that's coincidental, it tells you a lot about the Academy' (p. 4), aware of the politics of his positionality as a White male in the production on knowledge and its legitimation in the field.

Gillborn reflects on the reception of his work by Black academics, professionals, and communities, noting that positionality is definitely present in the room, but that he believes his work is well received. However, the status of the knowledge is always filtered by perceived positionality by the audience:

> So after a talk once about institutional racism a White, young woman asked me she said 'can I ask you a personal question?' and I said 'yes' and she said 'are you White?' and I said 'well, yeah all my family have always identified as White' and she kind of looked thoughtful for a second and then said 'oh OK' and then walked off. And I could not go after her to say 'hang on let us talk about what do you mean?' because there were lots of people around who wanted to talk to me and I've always thought that was interesting because whatever my answer, if she wanted to disregard what I said she could do it. So if she says 'are you White' and I say 'no, I'm mixed race' she could say 'ah well that explains it then, you would say that wouldn't you, it was the special pleading'. But if I say 'no, I'm White' she can go 'oh, so you admit you do not know what you are talking about'. So either way I think racism always has the stronger hand. (David Gillborn, Professor of Education, University of Birmingham, UK, p. 5)

Positionality is invoked in the following excerpt with a reflection on *who* can legitimately do what research:

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

> There are certain projects that I'm just not the right person to do. I might be someone who could be brought into the team, as a member of the team or as a part of an advisory group. But very clearly there's work, for example, around, I do not know, Black families' parental support. I mean there's some brilliant, radical work in those areas, but I'm just not the right person to do it. That's not self-censorship in a kind of 'oh I must not talk on these issues' it's just simply I would not be able to do that as a White-identified researcher. I do not have the knowledge, I do not have the tools, culturally or sociologically to do the best piece of work. So that's work not for me to do. (David Gillborn, Professor of Education, University of Birmingham, UK, p. 9)

Conversely, for ethnic minority academics, positionality can play an invisible role in self-censoring, where in the following account, the Lecturer is aware that her perceived positionality by students may be weaponised to delegitimise her intellectual contributions, invoking Fricker's (2009) concept of testimonial injustice:

> And we were just like talking about Edward Said and how that applies to these Hollywood productions or depictions of the Middle East. And one student, in an ... angry voice said 'Well I think some people in the Middle East are so emotional about things. So what if they are portrayed as terrorists? I mean as English people we are portrayed as scone eaters and tea drinkers, so we do not get offended with that' you know. So that sort of thing. Then I do not push that further, even though when I tell this to my English colleagues, they say, 'I would not be able to hold myself back'. And I was like no, I do not want to do that because of my positionality or how my positionality is perceived by the predominantly English classroom. (UK Lecturer and former Lecturer UAE, p. 10)

Epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2009) is also evident with the institutionalised racialisation of legitimate knowledge as illustrated in the account below discussing decisions made by funders about 'expertise':

> There was a scandal in geography, not amongst the White geographers but everyone else: so there was a grant that was issued on migration and all the grants of the people who were actually the experts – Black and Asian geographers, they did not get picked but the White geographers, they did get picked. And because people did not have the expertise they tried to then hire the Black and Asian geographers. (Lecturer in Geography, University of Leicester, UK, p. 6)

Debates about the democratisation of knowledge and contestation over notions of 'expertise' raise the issue of who holds the 'authority' to produce

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

legitimate knowledge. Inherent in the concept of democracy is the notion of the critical citizen, challenging established norms, which is evident in de Tocqueville's (1990; orig. 1835) theorisations of American democracy. Expertise can be conceptualised in terms of acquired skills and knowledge through education and experience. In addition, the willingness to accept assessment and evaluation by others from a community of experts is conceived to be a part of a dynamic notion of expertise (Nichols, 2017). Nichols (2017) laments the 'death of expertise' and derides the elevation of opinion over research-informed knowledge, where there is an elision between belief and knowledge. He argues that whilst there is an intellectual history of the relationship of expertise to authority, both the hostility to 'knowledge' and the belief that all opinions are valid are new. The question of presumed 'authority' is challenged regarding the practice of academics publicly commenting on issues outside their areas of expertise:

> So you'll get academics speaking out on all manner of things which they are not qualified, so Jordan Peterson speaking about gender for example – Jordan Peterson does not study gender, is not an expert on gender – but many people's opinions on gender are formed through hearing or reading Jordan Peterson talking about gender. So I think there's this danger, you know, of academics getting a kind of general authority granted to them by the world at large. (Senior Lecturer in Ethics, University of Sussex, p. 3)

Jordan Peterson, Professor of Psychology at the University of Toronto, has raised controversy for his views on race, gender, and Islam. In March 2019, the University of Cambridge rescinded his visiting Fellowship offer. Responding to concerns expressed by both students and faculty, a university spokesperson was quoted as stating: '[Cambridge] is an inclusive environment and we expect all our staff and visitors to uphold our principles. There is no place here for anyone who cannot' (The Guardian, 2019). Rather than this being an infringement of academic freedom, the reference to the University of Cambridge 'principles' invokes Chemerinsky and Gillman's (2017) distinction of professional standards in the academic community from broader speech rights extending beyond into the community and Baer's (2019) arguments for such principles being equivalent to rules and standards within the workplace.

Similarly, responsibility is invoked as a necessary basis for authority in the following account on the discipline of History:

> We clearly are in a classic crisis of kind of hegemony that the old verities that drove and represented Britain and British history for centuries have broken down

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

> in the last thirty or forty years, for reasons which are in a way obvious. And that has given rise to a crisis of authority and of legitimacy in academia. I think that academic freedom to me means, in summary, the right and the responsibility to undertake evidence-based research. It's obviously omitted from the statement from Academics for Academic Freedom, just passed over completely, that notion of responsibility. It's not a privilege but a responsibility. So that would be the first thing. And the second is that statement from Academics for Academic Freedom refers to opinions as explicitly that is what is being defended. I can see absolutely no justification for treating the opinions of academics as being in some way more or less sacrosanct than anybody else's opinions, but that's not what, I think, academic work should be about, and that's why I stressed the evidence-based. (Professor of History, UK, pp. 1–2)

There is a literature on the notion of lay expertise, which has developed in particular in the field of health and personal experiences of illness (Calnan and Williams, 1992; Prior, 2002). Such experiential knowledge has increasingly been recognised as having legitimacy, with funding often requiring the participation of the public in research (Harris et al., 2015). Yet, it is argued that such lay 'expertise' is wholly experiential, and as such, the use of 'expertise' in conjunction with 'lay' has been seen as an oxymoron (Prior, 2002). This leads us back to Goldman's distinctions of the contested different conceptions of knowledge and notions of 'truth'.

Contestations over legitimising different kinds of knowledge are also evident in debates surrounding indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge has been conceptualised as a 'lived world, a form of reason that informs and sustains people . . . a bridge between human beings and their environments' (Akena, 2015). The production of knowledge has also been studied in the field of social movements, including the affective production of knowledge (Kiwan, 2017a). Here, such knowledge entails emancipation, is emotive, and is inter-subjective. Western knowledge is taken as 'legitimate' rational and objective knowledge, and in its colonial interactions, this knowledge has been universalised as legitimate over other forms of indigenous knowledge. The fluidity and dynamic nature of knowledge production necessarily entail its contextualisation. Akena (2012, p. 600), in examining the marginalisation of indigenous knowledge, argues that the social, economic, and political contextualisation of the knowledge producers within these colonial contexts elucidates the 'domination and subjugation of indigenous knowledge'.

Working in the field of Native American Literature, a US Professor in Women's Studies recounts her growing awareness of her positionality as a non-native scholar in the field whilst doing her PhD:

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

> And it was my first time, you know not talking to indigenous people but talking to indigenous people with PhDs who asked me point blank 'what's in your research for us?' and I'm embarrassed to say that at the tender age of 29 I had never really thought about that . . . I found that they had really amazing abilities and institutions set up for archiving and taking care of and remembering their own literary histories in ways that non-Native institutions did not. Rather than being in need of what is referred to in the field as 'recovery work' – the discovery of forgotten literature, I found when I started talking to Native people that they did not need me to recover their stuff, they did not need non-Native scholars digging through archives to find their stuff, they already had it. So I had 12 tribal editors who each chose literature from their Tribal Nation and chose how to present it and really all I did was frame it (p. 1-2).

The issue of audience for this knowledge has implications for understanding academic freedom. Whilst noting that initially the assumption was that the primary audience would be her students, it unfolded that the anthology had a significant audience within Tribal communities, and in some instances, it was not deemed appropriate that some knowledge be shared outside the community:

> So it has wound up having an audience among Tribal communities and Tribal communities have done their own sort of readings and gatherings, using the book and it's grown into a website with an evolving digital magazine. And then it also shows up in places like historical societies and museums, places that have interests in indigenous history. But along the lines of academic freedom one thing that comes up with indigenous history is that scholars tend to think that academic freedom is the freedom to publish whatever we want and whatever interests us and of course indigenous people were telling me that that's not necessarily so. There may be stories that are sacred, that are not supposed to be shared outside the community. So academic freedom in that sense became more of a conversation with Native people and a desire to be guided by them in what was appropriate for distribution and not all scholars agree with this. Some scholars think that that's the ultimate infringement on our academic freedom if I allow a Tribal Elder to tell me not to publish something, that's an infringement on my academic freedom. I respectfully disagree, I do not think freedom means very much if we are trampling on the wishes and desires of other people, especially marginalised people. (p. 2)

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

7.3.2 University Diversity Initiatives

Diversity initiatives in UK and US contexts are a common feature in universities. In the United Kingdom, Athena SWAN was established in 2007 and is managed by the Equality Challenge Unit, with the stated purpose being to bring about structural and cultural change in higher education for women in the sciences, technology, engineering, maths, and medicine (STEMM). The scope of subjects expanded in 2015 to include arts and humanities, social sciences, and business and law; the geographical reach includes Ireland and a pilot in Australia (Tzanakou and Pearce, 2019). Institutions can apply for recognition at three levels of award, namely bronze, silver, or gold. A version of this scheme was piloted in the United States, called SEA Change for STEM subjects, hosted with a non-governmental organisation, the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS, 2022). In a similar vein, the UK (England, Scotland, and Wales) Race Equality Charter introduced in 2014 focuses on race equality, particularly in terms of representation of staff and students in higher education institutions, with thirty-one institutions involved in the trial. In 2022, universities expressed disapproval of government pressure to 'reconsider membership of the race equality scheme', in what has been characterised as culture wars, with the Minister of Education at that time describing the scheme as in tension with university duties to uphold free speech (The Guardian, 2022b). Less prominent, there is also a scheme relating to disability equality in the United Kingdom – '2 ticks' – positive about disability symbol which is awarded to employers who have 'made commitments to employ, keep and develop the abilities of disabled staff' (UCU, 2016); there is also the UK Stonewall Diversity Champions, which is a programme for employers on sexual orientation including trans.

It has been argued that the UK Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) is 'a product of neoliberalisation with the UK's academic environments, reflecting the tendency towards accountability, metric, and the performative "doing" of equality work' (Tzanakou and Pearce, 2019, p. 1191). Given the market logic, such initiatives typically prioritise outcomes that take the form of extra support, rather than addressing systemic institutional barriers. Tzankou and Pearce (2019) use the construct of 'moderate feminism' to refer to an approach of 'reasonableness'. This reasonableness invokes the dichotomy of rationality and emotion, where any affective response must be neutralised or contained as inappropriate. As such, this discourse does not recognise that emotion is actually a sociopolitical practice, rather an individual-level feeling (Ahmed, 2014). In addition, this discourse is embedded in a

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

marketised construction of individual competitiveness as opposed to social solidarity (Peck et al., 2009). Furthermore, it is often those who are marginalised (typically women and ethnic minorities) who are tasked with the burden of this work (ibid., 2009). Below, a senior ethnic minority academic in the United Kingdom whose work focuses on race and who has also held 'race equality' roles elucidates the paradox of these initiatives:

> I have been asked to champion race equality ... So I'm allowed to spout off whatever I like. And they do not come, they never come to my sessions but they are happy I'm doing them. Happy 'Oh [she's] doing that. We've ticked that box, it's fine'. It allows the status quo to just be you know. (Emeritus Professor of Sociology, UK, p. 4)

Whilst 'being allowed to spout off', there is a concomitant undermining of legitimacy in that the dissemination of such knowledge is contained within sessions that 'they never come to'. Furthermore, whilst such initiatives are supported, there is a lack of support in terms of funding, and hence the challenge in producing 'strong research' as opposed to being based on 'our experiences in higher education':

> So going back to the whole thing of academic freedom, you can spout off as much as you like, we are allowed that, but we cannot get the goodies and we cannot necessarily get that kind of very strong research. So I find that a lot of the work we do around race and gender and intersectionality, and our experiences in higher education are just based on our experiences, and not on hardcore big research grants you know. And I've noticed this across the board. And a lot of young people, young scholars are doing their own research without any funding at all. (p. 7)

The construct of 'strong research' as opposed to experiential research further delegitimises those whose research is already marginalised. Disciplinary and methodological constructions of 'quality' consolidate this process of delegitimisation, discussed in the following section.

7.3.3 Disciplinary Quality, Methodology, and the 'Canon'

Whilst semantically the understanding of 'discipline' as a noun describes content, it is pertinent to note that its origin stems from the verb form 'to discipline', corresponding to training in the methods associated with the content (Williams, 2016). Scott (2019) comments on the role of disciplines

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

as performing a protective function, yet concomitantly recognising that disciplinary structures are hierarchical and can act as a 'regulatory tool' (p. 49). Therefore, discipline denotes a 'practice', which can be inclined to 'policing and punishment of non-conformist thought and action' (Hudson, 2016, p. 34). Conversely, interdisciplinarity transgresses disciplinary boundaries and has been linked to thinking 'outside the box' – 'the activity of thinking – and its correlatives of teaching and research – exists precisely when one goes beyond the disciplinary' (Docherty, 2016, pp. 102–103).

The concept of a self-regulating disciplinary community based on expertise arose in practice, emerging from this conceptual framework. Although the content and practices of a discipline are not static, they entail a recognition of the legitimacy of the shared norms of the discipline. If the disciplinary norms are transgressed, there is the threat of exclusion from the disciplinary community. Debates on the role of the disciplines in knowledge production, therefore, entail the issue of quality and methodological rigour and are used in discourses legitimising or delegitimising research.

The well-publicised case of Lisa Littman, Assistant Professor at Brown University in Rhode Island, United States, is revisited. Her work on 'rapid onset gender dysphoria' came under attack from academic colleagues framed in terms of concern about the research design and data collection, where she was required to make post-publication amendments. The university posted a statement saying explicitly that the case was not about academic freedom, not because the research was deemed controversial, but rather because it was about 'academic standards' (Brown University, 2019). However, the context surrounding the case is highlighted in the following account, where scepticism over the discourse of 'quality' is evident:

> I think what Brown did was despicable. I mean I think it was not defensible because first of all, they were under pressure from groups to not even print the article and so they had the article on the website and then they withdrew it. Here is a person who is not tenured, who is going to be coming up for consideration, and now apparently the article's been reviewed again, it's been re-posted, there have been a few changes made but she still got to produce a scholarship. But they were successful in having the article taken down. And the reason I say that it's despicable is because other people's scholarship does not get the same review. Let us review everybody's scholarship the same way you know. If we are going to do that, let us do it to everybody. And the end result was that she had to make some adjustments in the article but I think the core of the article stands. But there was a chilling effect on other people doing that kind of research I think. (Professor Emeritus, Law, US, pp. 4–5)

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

Robert Plomin, Professor of Behavioural Genetics at King's College, London, and author of *Blue Print: How DNA Makes Us Who We Are* (2018), recounts that one of his greatest concerns in publishing his work was the reaction from academic colleagues, and that this has been the main reason for publishing his book at a much later stage in his career. He reflects on the challenges in publishing his work throughout his career. This was especially the case during the earlier career stages, and at a time when behavioural genetics in the discipline of Psychology was unpopular: 'The extra hurdles you had to go through if you were studying something controversial. So, and also for publication, the research had to be a lot better to get it published, because people needed to be convinced – if you publish something saying the environment's important, you know, no problem – everybody accepts that' (p. 3).

Conversely, 'quality' is inferred from 'legitimate' evidence used to validate argument, as evident in the following account on legitimate historical evidence:

> So we have faced pressure from corporations whose work or whose histories we have identified . . . 'Are you sure? Show us the evidence. Are you clear that what you are saying is supported and is the way that you are saying it consistent with the evidence?' And that is in the end an easy conversation because we have done the work, we know where the documents are and we can demonstrate that what we are asserting is true, historically true, in relation to particular companies and concerns. But business corporations have been the most active in if you like, seeking to correct us. (Professor of History, UK, p. 3)

Similarly, quantitative research is associated with objectivity, neutrality, evidence, and truth and contrasted with qualitative research as political, subjective, partisan, and relative. As highlighted by Gillborn (2010, p. 272), statistics are 'generally equated with scientific rigour and objectivity'. As discussed earlier in the chapter, quantitative research evidence is not excluded from the influence of assumptions and context. Gillborn (2010) warns of the dangers and responsibility of researchers in recognising the power of numbers and their influence on policy and practice.

Debates on disciplinary quality are also central to discourses on the 'Canon'. The Canon is assumed to be a universal recognition of works of quality, based on 'objectively' agreed standards. Tracing the intellectual history of the disciplines, Williams (2016) notes that before the twentieth century, 'liberal education' consisted of humanities-related disciplines, based on the rationale and assumption that this approach best prepared men for

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

elite leadership of the Empire. The legitimacy of religious foundations of knowledge was increasingly challenged through the Enlightenment with a shift towards secular knowledge.

The 'Canon' has been challenged by post-colonial, critical, and feminist theorists, with growing recognition of the sociopolitical and historical construction and positionality of knowledge and its embedded values (Arday and Mirza, 2018; Banks, 1993; Giroux, 1983; Habermas, 1971). The recognition of the positionality and particularity of the 'Canon' is evidenced in various university initiatives on decolonising the curriculum. That the decolonisation of the curriculum entails a process of legitimating alternative ways of knowing, feeling, and thinking to address the epistemic violence of the Canon is recounted below:

> We all had to learn the British Canon. We learnt British history, we learnt British literature, we had to read Shakespeare, we had to do you know, we learnt the canon of the master. But we were able to use that, the tropes and the literary expressions and all of that, we were able to use that to write our post-colonial stories you know. (Emeritus Professor of Sociology, UK, pp. 11–12)

7.3.4 Discourses of Civility

As discussed in the previous chapters, the concept of 'civility' has been used to discredit critique by focusing on *how* this critique is delivered. The critique of a large-scale externally funded UK-based project entitled 'Ethics and Empire' led by Nigel Biggar, Professor of Theology, University of Oxford, resulted in a heated expression of concern and frustration at the perceived controversial premise and aims of the project, its funding, and University of Oxford's support, and hence legitimation for this work. The interdisciplinary project aims to develop a 'Christian ethics of empire'. On asking Professor Biggar if he felt that his academic freedom had been infringed, he focused on the ways in which the critique had been delivered and its lack of civility:

> but the ***manner*** in which various groups of people decided to register their objections, the manner really does not invite discussion, in other words so I'm not averse to take what I've written or said and say 'you said this, I disagree, here are the reasons', when we have a kind of rational responsible conversation and we give and take reasons. But when you have got 60 Oxford colleagues denouncing a project or 170 worldwide denouncing a project, it's not designed to dialogue at all, so that was one of my objections. That was not even addressed to me, it was

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

> addressed to my university … so that certainly was not designed to start a conversation with me about anything, it was designed to put pressure on my university to reconsider its support for the project, in other words, it was designed I think quite explicitly to make the project, 'Ethics and Empire' unviable. (Nigel Biggar, Professor of Theology, University of Oxford, UK, p. 5)

The high-profile case of Stephen Salaita has led to debate regarding 'civility' and its relationship to academic freedom. As mentioned previously, Stephen Salaita had been offered an academic position of employment at the University of Illinois as a Professor of Native American Studies which was subsequently withdrawn, as a result of university donor objections to Salaita's tweets criticising Israel and Zionism in the context of a fifty-one-day Israeli military assault of Gaza. His offer was rescinded by the chancellor in August 2014 presented in terms of civility: 'What we cannot and will not tolerate at the University of Illinois are personal and disrespectful words or actions that demean and abuse either viewpoints themselves or those who express them' (Moshman and Edler, 2015). The statement notes that in the US context, 'uncivil' speech is protected in law by the First Amendment, although not in educational contexts. Whilst there is no legal requirement for civility, nor sanctions against it, it was argued that civility creates a supportive respectful learning environment ideally modelled by academic faculty.

Yet, Salaita (2015a) defends the use of incivility, claiming incivility is the only civilised response to barbarity. Arguing for the importance of contextualising the positionality of the incivility, Salaita elaborates: 'My tweets might appear uncivil, but such a judgment cannot be made in an ideological or rhetorical vacuum. Insofar as "civil" is profoundly racialised and has a long history of demanding conformity, I frequently choose incivility as a form of communication. This choice is both moral and rhetorical.' Puar (2015, pp. 64–65) argues that certain bodies are deemed disposed to incivility, and as such, it is not just an issue of the incivility of linguistic expression, but rather that the 'ideological evaluation of speech is used to reinforce the production of certain bodies as threatening, dangerous, and uncivil'. Puar highlights the contrasting language used in the Charlie Hebdo case, where rather than a discourse of the 'incivility' of Islamophobic cartoons, it is referred to as 'political satire'.

It is argued that the history of the discourse of incivility has operated as a form of 'racial and class denouncement' in US and European contexts since the nineteenth century (Massad, 2014). The binary of civility/incivility can be seen as a more politically correct yet masked reformulation of the

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

cultured/uncultured binary which is 'openly colonial'; it is relevant to note that 'civil' derives from civilization, with its settler-colonial and imperial legacies (Salaita, 2015a). Tracing the use of discourses of incivility used against Eastern European Jews' perceived lack of assimilation in the United States, Massad (2014) draws a parallel with the case of Steven Salaita and, indeed, the challenges he himself has faced whilst at Columbia University, with concerns – expressed also by Arab-American colleagues pertaining to his 'vulgar Arab incivility' and 'immoderation'. He contrasts this reaction with the support from his 'liberal Jewish colleagues who gave [him] their unequivocal support and showed no discernible concern about the question of "civility"'(Massad, 2014). This positionality not only is a historical position but also continues into the contemporary lived context of various forms of discrimination, as Salaita tweeted on 21 June 2019: 'Because "civility" compels people to work with racial segregationists, corporate hacks, colonial settlers, sexual predators, and war criminals, I'll go ahead and proudly remain uncivil' (@stevesalaita, 2019). The discourse of civility also reflects assumptions of the rationality and objectivity of knowledge, as opposed to experiential, subjective, or affective constructions of knowledge. As such, the use of the term 'civility' excludes and delegitimates such knowledge.

Related to discourses of civility, the terms 'snowflakes' and 'wokeness' are used to delegitimate any critiques of dominant forms of knowledge production. It is commonly argued that the political left wing is limiting academic freedom, with its concerns relating to 'controversial' speakers or research projects or unnecessarily protecting 'oversensitive' students. Furedi (2017) refers to the 'therapeutic' construction of education and society and the infantilisation of young adult students; he critiques 'trigger warnings', concerns of protecting minorities from hate speech and calls to decolonise the curriculum and the established centuries-old canon, as illegitimate attacks on academic freedom. This discourse is predicated on the abstraction of knowledge from the existing power relations between groups and its sociopolitical context, and instead assuming the neutrality and equality of different knowledges, as if on a 'level playing field'. In contrast, the importance of historicising power relations is elucidated in the account below:

> the cost . . . is disproportionately borne by people who are already the targets and already disadvantaged by White supremacy, by male supremacy, heteropatriarchy and no society should tolerate, no community, academic community should tolerate people who are already precarious, bearing the brunt, carrying the burden of the principle of free speech. (Professor of English and Women's Studies, US, p. 8)

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

7.3.5 Skills, Employment, and Research Assessment

As discussed in the previous chapters, neoliberal and market pressures on higher education are evident in the dominant functionalist interrelated discourses of skills, education for employment, and research *impact*. That this is a widespread globalised discourse is commented on:

> There is a big debate now about the value of education ... is it worth the investment and so on. And ... they think of employability and, you know, what is the expectation, you know, how are you expected to make money on graduation and so on. And I think, as a result of that, there is an attempt to come up with metrics and these metrics are connected to employability and to define certain areas where it's OK to provide the funding. (former Professor, AUB, Lebanon, pp. 1–2)

The internationalisation and privatisation of higher education globally drive a logic of the monetary worth of qualifications and the operationalisation of a qualification into employment and earning power. This impacts the perceived legitimacy of those humanities and social sciences disciplines compared to professional degrees. Whilst the discourse of skills and employment is a global one, in the Arab world it is particularly dominant given that most universities do not have a liberal arts–based requirement. In contrast, in the US context, typically professional degrees at high-status institutions have liberal arts requirements, thus providing a form of legitimation for such knowledge.

The governance of research in the Arab world is typically centrally organised through government ministries of education, although in Lebanon, which is a highly decentralised system, this governance is managed by an independent council; this is also the case for the UAE, although its governance is described as 'trade-oriented' (Hanafi and Arvanitis, 2015). The UAE scores the highest for innovation in the region, with Lebanon scoring significantly lower (ibid., 2015), measured using a World Bank Global Innovation Index. The World Bank has also devised a Knowledge Economy Index which ranks the highest in the UAE, championing the UAE as a model for the future based on the liberalisation of the economy, privatisation, entrepreneurship, innovation, and less state control (Hanafi and Arvanitis, 2015). Of note is that Lebanon, with a more established research tradition, does not perform well on the Knowledge Economy Index. Hanafi and Arvanitis (2015) question the 'objectivity' of the index and advocate a more diversified model.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

This emphasis on skills for employment is also reflected in terms of funding of teaching programmes and research. This is evident in the example of the UK Research Evaluation Framework (REF) as noted in Chapter 5. The REF is a national assessment exercise of research 'quality' upon which funding of universities is decided, the concept of 'impact' is prioritized, and research meeting these criteria is legitimated. The REF has been critiqued as a manifestation of the 'neoliberal audit culture that infests universities' and a form of governance to ensure 'appropriate returns' on public investment (MacDonald, 2017, p. 706). It has also been critiqued that it curtails creativity through constraining research to produce narrow outcomes (Watermeyer, 2016). The REF illustrates both the commodification and the regulation of universities (Burawoy, 2011). The REF and the impact agenda act as a legitimising or delegitimising mechanism shaping what research is conducted. The rise of systematic research reviews supporting evidence-informed policymaking in education illustrates this logic, where knowledge is produced to meet the aims determined by policymakers. In this framework, knowledge is 'beholden to the strategic and technocratic frameworks' of the research councils and government (Watermeyer, 2016). A UK Professor of Sociology comments on how the discipline of Sociology has been shaped and delegitimated by the REF and impact agenda:

> You see that in the declining number of submissions to the sociology REF panel, so if you look at most sociologists in Britain I think are now submitted to the social policy REF panel, but the social policy REF panel is putting less emphasis upon sociology as one of its background disciplines. So it's increasingly reaching out towards psychology and towards economics as part of the interdisciplinary foundation of social policy and that's following this sort of behavioural shift. And what you notice is most places that are, you know, most degrees in social policy have collapsed undergraduate degrees. So we have social policy REF submission supported by sociology undergraduate degrees. So sociology I think is being shaped in that direction and, at the same time, the nature of the work in that area becomes less sociological, so people start describing themselves as working on a particular applied topic 'oh my interest is in health', not as 'I'm a sociologist working on health'. (Professor of Sociology, University of Nottingham, UK, p. 1)

This account illustrates the shift to legitimating more applied constructions of the discipline that are topic based and related to policy, such as health and influence by more behavioural disciplines.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

7.3.6 Funding and International Partnerships

International networks and 'North–South' partnerships have gained prominence in social science funding over the last two decades. This rationale supports the participation of relatively marginalised partners in co-constructing research agendas and building research capacity in the Global South. Yet, it has been argued that there is still the 'fundamental problem' that the Global South provides the data but does not usually set the theoretical or research agendas, which is central in the larger social process of knowledge production (Connell, 2014). A number of interviewees commented on the political use of transnational partnerships to legitimise knowledge, through institutionalised research council grant requirements: 'There are research agendas and when you are collaborating with the UK or the US, by the fashion you are collaborating with, I mean, with people who have many more resources, you know, larger institutions, a larger number of researchers and so on and quite often what they are looking for is a token local partner' (former AUB Professor, Lebanon, p. 8).

In the field of migration research, international networks and North–South partnerships are requirements for funding. The objectives for such funding schemes entail the inclusive production of knowledge and building regional research capacity in the Global South. Whilst laudable objectives, the structural constraints and historical power relations expose the inequalities between North and South and inadvertently may be reified (Landau, 2012). In addition, the agenda of impact and addressing global challenges direct the nature of research towards policy-driven research, and so research councils retain the authority over funding and the legitimation of research (Landau, 2012). The 'business of refugees' is used to describe the legitimated policy-driven research on refugees: 'The business of refugees, you know, it became a business and there are literally hundreds of NGOs and so on and there is a card that goes to the locals and, you know, quite a bit of the money, the funds go to international NGOs and so on. So it becomes a business' (former AUB Professor, Lebanon, p. 9).

Indeed, Hanafi (2010) has illustrated how international sources of research funding in the region have channelled social science research away from higher education institutions and towards policy-oriented consultancies. Yet, he notes that European Union (EU) funding schemes in the region have been a relative success with 300 million euros spent on research in the region between 2007 and 2013 (Hanafi and Arvanitis, 2015). In Lebanon, in particular, international research collaborations have increased particularly with

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

European partners, with co-publications increasing from 22 percent in 1987 to 55 percent in 2006 (ibid., 2015). In examining research collaboration across the region, looking at the Qatar National Research Fund, less than 15 percent are with collaborators in the Arab world, and there is also little within-country collaboration (ibid., 2015).

Whilst there have been efforts to respond to critiques of unequal partnerships, the focus has been relatively more on the implementation and dissemination of research, rather than interrogating processes of agenda setting and research governance (Fransman and Newman, 2019). As such, the practice of partnerships is the focus, rather than examining epistemological conceptions and the political economy of knowledge. There have been calls for partnerships between the Global North and Global South to be understood as ethical concerns. Walsh et al. (2016) note that typically broader power relations are not treated as an ethics concern in the field of health research, and they propose a Bourdieusian lens to understand North–South inequalities in research collaborations. They use Bourdieu's notion of habitus to explore the legacy of colonialism in North–South partnerships and the maintenance and legitimacy of the status quo; considering economic, symbolic, and scientific capital, they also critically examine funding arrangements.

These structural and economic inequalities between North and South impede competing on a level playing for large-scale EU and US grants, which can be understood in terms of discrepancies in 'capital' and 'habitus':

> There were certain funds which were non-competitive which were reserved for partnerships with less competitive institutions because, you know, you have to compete, it's almost impossible, you really cannot compete. The European funding, they have opened it up so you will be competing, it's by and large competitive. They will not reserve anything for let us say this other part of the Mediterranean which they used to do, but they are now opening globally so you are competing with US scientists and with Japanese scientists and of course with German scientists and so on and it's impossible to compete, but they continue to reserve a little bit of funding for . . . they encourage collaborative funding and collaborative projects but, at the same time, it's next to impossible to compete for these collaborative projects. (former Professor, AUB, Lebanon, p. 7)

The politics of research that does not even get funding is raised in the account below, referred to as 'neglected diseases'. This term in itself illustrates that it is recognised that research is not being conducted on these diseases despite sizeable populations suffering:

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

> They [diseases] are neglected in relation to their disease burden, so they are often the diseases which are causing the most suffering and affecting the greatest numbers of people but are just, you know, getting a disproportionately small amount of research funding and attention compared with diseases which primarily affect Global North populations and also diseases which pose threats to Global North populations, so ones which are easily transmissible, things like HIV for example, which does get a fair amount of funding, and tuberculosis and also malaria. But beyond that, there are all these other ones called neglected tropical diseases and they do not get funding. And the reason for that is because even if we were to develop effective treatments there would be nobody to pay for those treatments to get them out to the populations who need them. So it's sort of a dead end in a way by virtue of the way the global economy works and the marketisation of health. (Lecturer in Ethics, UK, p. 11)

This illustrates the politicisation of global funding, where funding is available for those diseases affecting populations in the Global North as opposed to those in the Global South, where there is not deemed to be a market for the development of treatments arising from such research. As a result, the marketisation of the application of such research delegitimises the perceived need to undertake this research.

7.3.7 Global Legitimating Systems

Global university rankings play an important role in higher education, in spite of having been critiqued as part of the neoliberal and audit culture (Ball and Olmedo, 2013) and of succumbing to the rise of metrics and data (Lim, 2018). In examining the practices of various ranking systems, Lim (2018) argues that the processes of legitimation entail using 'hard' data such as bibliometrics and also input from a range of stakeholders including students. The interactions with stakeholders are the means by which audience 'trust' is built for the ranking system – in effect, the legitimation of their knowledge. Contestation over university rankings entails, firstly, a methodological debate about the reliability of such rankings. It has been argued that objective ranking systems cannot exist as they necessarily entail 'adding up a converted value by means of an a priori (e.g. subjectively) assumed system of weighting' (Rocki, 2005, p. 179). As such, the legitimacy of rankings is questioned. In addition, it is important to contextualise the increased use of university rankings in relation to the globalisation and massification of higher education and the marketised logic of the student as 'customer'. There is also contestation over what constitutes a 'good' university.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

Turner (2008) analysed various university ranking systems and identified that many UK higher education institutions, which did not appear in the top 200 global ranking, performed better than Oxford and Cambridge on national rankings. He gives the example of the University of Lancaster and University of York, which were very effective at converting input into research outputs – in effect, a type of 'value-added' score. However, many universities in Europe and the Asian Pacific have adjusted their strategic objectives to meet the criteria of 'world-class' universities as defined by the global rankings methodology. This heightened legitimacy does not take into account the significant inequalities in resources between universities in the Global North and Global South. Jons and Hoyler (2013) illustrate that the global circulation of knowledge aligns with Anglo-American publication cultures and publishing in the English language. However, they identify the emergence of new 'knowledge' hubs' which increasingly may have significant transnational influence in the production of knowledge. They argue that the partiality of such global ranking systems undermines their authority and legitimacy, and that 'other measures and subject-specific perspectives would produce very different geographies' (Jons and Hoyler, 2013, p. 57).

There is a significant literature on the international division of knowledge labour between the Global North and the Global South, whereby Northern scholars in North–South collaborations have outcomes of publishable knowledge, whilst Southern scholars play more of a role of 'sub-contractors' (Kreimer and Zabala, 2008). Collyer (2018, p. 57) reminds us that 'knowledge is not just a product of individual knowledge-makers', but rather it entails 'systematic boundaries and mechanisms of exclusion across and between countries and regions of the world'. Furthermore, whilst scholarship in the Global North tends to claim universality, scholarship in the Global South typically locates the research in context (Baber, 2003). Citation practices also diverge, with the Global North showing patterns of self-citation, with rare citation of Southern scholars by Northern scholars (Collyer, 2018). In contrast, Southern scholars are outward looking in their citation practices. Such differences in publication and citation practices reify and consolidate the inequalities in transnational knowledge production. This politics of citation has been critiqued by critical feminist and anti-racists scholars in the Global North, who argue that current practices of citation consolidate 'the continued hegemony of white heteromasculine knowledge production' and the marginalisation and delegitimation of 'subaltern and otherwise othered populations' (Mott and Cockayne, 2017, pp. 956–958).

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

An example of this can be seen in the study of who were the dominant knowledge producers on knowledge of the 'Arab Spring' (AlMaghlouth et al., 2015). In a network analysis, it was found that the majority of published articles on the topic (75 percent) were from outside the Arab region, with 30 percent accounted for by US authors. Furthermore, of those articles published within the region, there was a slight majority published in Arabic, thus constraining it to a more domestic audience. Furthermore, the majority of publications are located with the disciplines of political science/international relations, with only 14 percent being based on field research. AlMaghlouth et al. (2015) conclude that there is a hierarchy of three levels of knowledge production; first, authors with the greatest 'legitimacy' are from the US Ivy league universities considered to be 'experts' given their theoretical expertise; second, there are less-cited scholars in spite of their scholarly expertise – often local scholars or French-speaking scholars; and third, there are those scholars writing in Arabic from the region. Whilst the third level in the hierarchy cites the authors in the first level of the hierarchy, those authors from outside the region rarely cite the local experts, thus delegitimising their knowledge on the global stage.

However, examining the distribution of academic knowledge production, there has been a shift towards a 'non-English speaking periphery' in Brazil, South Korea, Taiwan, and China; as such, this reflects a shift from a centre-periphery model to a more multi-polar model of knowledge production (Hanafi and Arvanitis, 2015, p. 88), challenging this epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2009). Yet, the publication output of the Arab world remains low: 'Now in terms of the production of knowledge, there is a lack of accurate figures. So there is less investment, there is less production, I mean, we could look at number of dissertations produced, whenever there are records, you know, for some of the largest universities, I mean, we are not even talking here about quality. It's quite dismal' (former Professor, AUB, Lebanon, pp. 2–3).

However, Hanafi and Arvanitis (2015) have shown that the rate of growth over the last two decades are above world averages and comparable to the emerging powers of Chile, South Africa, and Thailand. They make the case for the region being an emerging knowledge producer, with Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Jordan contributing to this, as well as huge growth in the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Yet, citations of publications in the region are low, excluding the role of a language effect. Whilst impact cannot be inferred from citation, influence, recognition, and status within the academic community are invoked by such

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009

measures. As such, citation confers legitimacy. Composite H-index calculations by country are low for the region; however, Lebanon and the UAE score fourth and fifth in the region, respectively (109 and 100, respectively), compared to 943 and 1,518 for the United States and United Kingdom, respectively, for the period 1996–2013 (Hanafi and Arvanitis, 2015). Legitimacy also comes from publishing in internationally recognised journals, rather than local journals, and can at least account in part for relatively few academic books published in Arabic geared towards a local audience (Hanafi, 2010). Hanafi and Arvanitis (2015) analysed publication databases for publications produced at the American University of Beirut, and they illustrated that 68 percent of knowledge is invisible to international audiences. This also impacts the world rankings of universities, as this knowledge is invisible.

7.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has critically examined the concept of legitimate knowledge, in terms of how it is both constructed and operationalised. Examining the concepts of 'legitimacy' and related concepts of 'authority', 'right', and 'acceptance' in political science literatures, I juxtapose this with different constructs of knowledge and how this relates to 'belief', 'justification', and 'truth'. I examine a range of factors and systems that shape how knowledge is legitimated transnationally, including positionality, university diversity initiatives, disciplinary debates and the 'Canon', modes of communication, national systems of research assessment, funding and international partnerships and global systems of university ranking, publication systems, and citation. I illustrate how these systems of standardisation located with globalised discourses of internationalisation are predisposed to favouring the status quo. However, multi-polar nodes of knowledge production are increasingly challenging this hegemony and universalising constructs of legitimacy inherent in national and global systems of knowledge production.

Downloaded from https://www.cambridge.org/core. UNIVERSIDAD AUTONOMA METROPOLITANA, on 19 Nov 2026 at 16:58:30, subject to the Cambridge Core terms of use, available at https://www.cambridge.org/core/terms. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108780629.009